

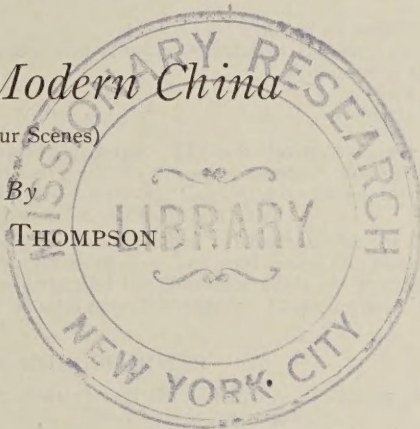
BEYOND THE SKYLINE

A Play of Modern China

(In Four Scenes)

By

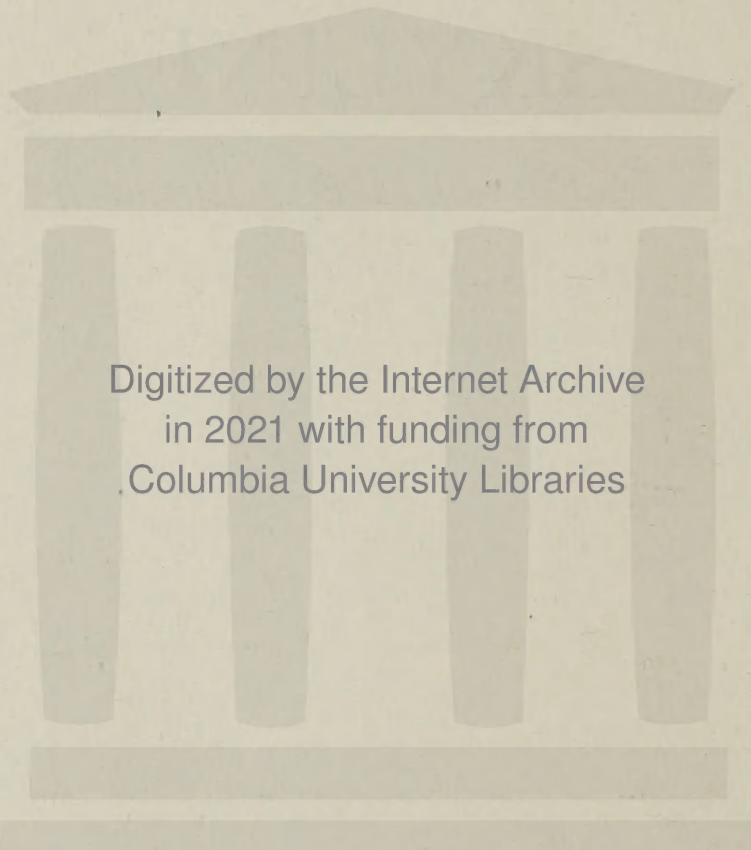
RUTH C. THOMPSON



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Beyond the Skyline

SCENE I. The athletic field of a government high school in Canton.

SCENE II. The garden of the same school, a year later than Scene I.

SCENE III. A corner of a chemistry laboratory two years after Scene II.

SCENE IV. Same as Scene II, only one year later than Scene III.

CHARACTERS

Mei Ling (Māy līng)	}	- - - -	Girls in a government high school in Canton
So Wan (sō wun)			
Lai Yin (līe yēēn)			
Wing Fong (wīng fōng)			
Kan Yee (gūn yēē)	}	- - - -	Boys in the same school
Wa Shang (wǎ shǎng)			
Yik Tok (yik tāk)			
Tuen I (tūē ēē)			
Miss Lee	- - - -	- - - -	Director of girls' athletics
A Rich Merchant	- - - -	- - - -	Teacher of political science
Mr. Tong (tōng)	- - - -	- - - -	Friend of Mr. Tong and a minor official in the city government
Mr. Fung (fōng)	- - - -	- - - -	Professor of chemistry
Dr. Aldrich	- - - -	- - - -	His assistant
Mr. Hau (how)	- - - -	- - - -	An elderly scientist
The Celebrity	- - - -	- - - -	

Note: There are fifteen characters, six girls and nine boys. The cast allows of several doubling possibilities. For the girls, Kan Yee and Miss Lee could be the same person. For the boys the following suggestions are made: The Rich Merchant and the Celebrity be taken by one boy; Mr. Tong and Mr. Hau by another; Mr. Fung and Dr. Aldrich by a third.

This would reduce the cast to eleven, five girls and six boys. If boys are in the minority, redoubling possibilities might be had in the characters of Yik Tok and Tuen I. The names of the boys in this play are those of either boys or girls, and the character parts are written in such a way that they can be played by girls with little alteration, if desired. In such a way, the play could be adapted for eight girls and three boys.

DESCRIPTIONS AND COSTUMES

All of the characters are Chinese except Dr. Aldrich and the Celebrity. As many as possible should be dark; and most of the school-girls slender. Short hair is preferable.

In the first scene, the girls wear shorts, gym outfits or sport clothes of some kind. Each has a heavy sweater. Lai Yin, however, dresses like the girls in Scene II. She wears a sweater and carries a knitting bag with a skein of heavy, dark colored wool.

Miss Lee is neat and trim in every detail of her appearance. She might wear a sports tunic or similar dress. A whistle is slung on a cord around her neck. There is a ring set with a large diamond on her right hand.

The Rich Merchant is dressed in a long grey gown, with short jacket, hat and soft shoes of black silk.

Mr. Tong, Mr. Fung and Mr. Hau dress like Canadian young men. Their suits should be well cut and of good material.

In Scenes II and IV characters, both boys and girls, dress like Canadian students.

In Scene III Mei Ling and Wa Shang wear rubber laboratory aprons.

SCENE I

An unused part of a large athletic field. A bare stage, with a low wooden bench left of centre will suffice. Occasional shouts off stage indicate that boys are playing football near by.

Enter Mei Ling and So Wan with tennis racquets. They are breathless and dishevelled. They pull on their sweaters and attempt to straighten their hair.

So Wan: Am I tired! **(Drops down on bench.)** I never worked so hard at a game in all my life. **(Pulls out a handkerchief and mops her face.)**

Mei Ling: Nor I. **(Puts one foot on the bench and ties a shoelace with determined jerks.)** But wasn't it fun?

So Wan: Fun? That's hardly the word for it.

Mei Ling: Where on earth! **(Hunts through her pockets and finally produces a small comb)** Oh, here it is. **(Combs her bobbed hair hastily and not too well. So Wan watches her, amused.)** I've resolved to be tidy—beginning to-day.

So Wan: Trying to be like your beloved Miss Lee, I suppose. Do you think, Mei, that you will ever achieve that sleek perfection?

Mei Ling: Oh, you make me tired. Why can't a girl be decently friendly with a teacher without— **(Throws herself down and chews a bit of grass moodily.)**

So Wan: **(Pats her head conciliatingly.)** No offence, dear. You were remarking that you thought our quiet stroll on the tennis court was fun.

Mei Ling: I did. It made me feel as if I were getting somewhere, doing something. **(So Wan grimaces.)** You know it was just what we needed to get ready for the tournament.

(Enter from left, Wing Fong.)

Wing Fong: What a weariness! **(Sits beside So Wan, who throws a casual arm around her. Wing Fong picks at the threads of a missing button.)**

So Wan: Been digging ditches?

Wing Fong: No, playing volley ball. Miss Lee must have had a row with her boy friend to work us like that. **(Mei Ling looks up sharply, then pretends not to be interested.)**

So Wan: Has she a boy friend?

Mei Ling: **(Sits up suddenly.)** Why shouldn't she? She's pretty and clever and athletic and . . .

So Wan: **(Pats Mei Ling's shoulder.)** There, there, dear. We understand. Go right back to sleep. Nobody's insulting your beloved. **(to Wing Fong)** Where is the boy friend? **(Mei Ling picks up a stick and digs the ground with short furious thrusts, but now and then stops to listen.)**

Wing Fong: In Honolulu. Haven't you ever noticed my lady when the American mail comes in? Ah, what grief if he hasn't written!

So Wan: Do you suppose her diamond's an engagement ring?

Wing Fong: Of course. Last fall one day, I saw her change it to her left hand when she thought nobody was looking.

So Wan: **(Thoughtfully.)** Humph! She doesn't seem the romantic sort.

(Enter Lai Yin from right.)

So Wan: Why, where's your gym outfit? Aren't you playing to-day? The volley-ball team's practising now!

Lai Yin: No. Not playing to-day—nor any other day. **(Sits, takes ball of wool from bag and lays it over her knees to wind it.)**

Mei Ling: You're giving up volley-ball! **(Sits up and holds out hands for skein.)**

Lai Yin: Why not? **(Lays wool over Mei Ling's hands and starts winding.)**

So Wan: But you're one of our best players.

Lai Yin: **(With a pleased smile which she quickly conceals.)** If that's true, what of it? It doesn't get me anywhere.

Mei Ling: It would get me somewhere. Why, Lai Yin, haven't you felt it, the glory of a hard fight—the feeling that you're putting everything you have into it—and afterward that happy tiredness that comes when you've done your very best? **(Her gestures tangle the skein of wool.)**

Lai Yin: Don't get excited, Miss Preacher. If you're going to wind wool, keep your mind on that. **(They try to straighten the wool.)** I'll tell you what I see in athletics. **(In a low intense tone.)** Sweat. Noise. Dirt. A foolish futile dashing about after heaven knows what. **(Mei Ling looks troubled, So Wan amused.)**

Wing Fong: You're not turning old-fashioned, are you, Lai Yin?

Lai Yin: **(Jumps up, dropping the wool and thrusting her hands into her pockets.)** Me! **(Turns her back on them and walks to right. Turns suddenly.)** I know it's the fashion now for schoolgirls to be Amazons. But I maintain my right to choose what I want to be and do.

Mei Ling: You're awfully discouraging, with your scoffing at everything. **(Throws ball back and dusts her hands on each other.)** Surely some things ought to be taken seriously. **(Begins to work with the wool again.)** Lai Yin, what really do you enjoy doing?

Lai Yin: **(Sits and takes up wool.)** My music—the stars. **(Looks up, meets Mei Ling's earnest gaze, and turns flippant.)** What fools they must think us!

So Wan: **(Smiling.)** Ask her another!

Mei Ling: **(Puckers her brow, thinks a while, then suddenly speaks.)** Games do help to make us physically fit.

Lai Yin: Fit for what? That's the real question, isn't it?

So Wan: **(Pretending to tear her hair.)** You make my head ache with your philosophizings! Why bother to think?

(Enter Wa Shang, followed by Yik Tok and Tuen I.)

Wa Shang: Who's making the baby think? It shouldn't be allowed.

Tuen I: Right you are, Wa Shang. It's easier to keep going if you don't.

Wing Fong: How did the practice go to-day? Think you can take the Normal?

Yik Tok: Think we can! Nothing can stop us now. Ladies, meet the new captain. (He indicates Wa Shang with an elaborate gesture.) (There is a chorus of "Oh's" and "Ah's" of admiration from the girls. Wa Shang tries to appear modest, but smiles with pleasure at their support.)

So Wan: Congratulations, Wa Shang. You have a hard job ahead of you.

Mei Ling: (Thoughtfully.) But the hard things seem more—more real somehow.

Wa Shang: (Laughing.) Well, I know that I'll have plenty of help, won't I, fellows? (The other two boys nod vigorous assent.) I'm counting on you. We can't lose if we work together.

(Enter Miss Lee from left, briskly.)

Wing Fong: Oh, Miss Lee, isn't it great? Wa Shang's just been made captain.

Miss Lee: Why, how splendid, Wa Shang. When's the first game?

Wa Shang: Thursday, and already my teeth are beginning to chatter.

Miss Lee: Keep your courage up. That's the important thing. It's the captain's spirit that counts, you know, and courage and sportsmanship are the finest things in life. (Mei Ling looks admiringly at her during this speech.)

Wa Shang: Guess you're right, Miss Lee. We'll fight to the finish. Come along, fellows. Got to keep in training, remember. (Boys go out right.)

Miss Lee: Up, girls. Better go and wash up before dinner. (They rise, Miss Lee lays a hand on Mei Ling's shoulder.) Just a minute, Mei Ling. I'd like to talk to you. (Girls go off left.)

Mei Ling: Certainly, Miss Lee.

(Miss Lee stands irresolute for a moment, takes a letter out of her pocket, looks at it and puts it back.)

Miss Lee: Mei Ling, my dear—

Mei Ling: Yes, Miss Lee.

Miss Lee: (Nervously.) You're a friend of mine aren't you? (Mei Ling nods vigorously.) I wonder if you would do me a big favor.

Mei Ling: I'd love to. That is, if I could. But how—

Miss Lee: I'll tell you how. There is someone whom I must see—must talk to—in some private place. Here I've only a room, I can't ask him to come here.

Mei Ling: (Aside, puzzled.) Him?

Miss Lee: It's much too public, but I thought perhaps—your home is near by—

Mei Ling: (Slowly.) And you want to meet him there.

Miss Lee: (Startled.) Did I say "him"? Why, yes, that's about it. It's really awfully important.

Mei Ling: Of course I want to help you. I don't know what my father would think, though, or how I would ever explain. Couldn't you—please excuse me for hesitating—there are reception rooms here—

Miss Lee: (With an embarrassed little laugh.) As a matter of fact, I want to avoid talk. You know how school girls gossip. And some of them may know— (Stops, biting her lip in annoyance.)

Mei Ling: Know about your engagement ring.

Miss Lee: Mei Ling! Who told you that?

Mei Ling: (Sadly.) School girls do talk, you know.

Miss Lee: Oh, Mei, my dear, you aren't judging me, are you, as those silly gossips might? I thought you would be bigger. Please understand me. I don't want to lose your respect.

Mei Ling: I want to understand, Miss Lee, truly I do. Would you—couldn't you—explain just a little?

Miss Lee: (Takes Mei Ling's arm and draws her to the bench, where they both sit.) Now, Mei Ling, don't be old-fashioned, please. (Thinks.) I did get engaged—when I was a romantic child. I was swept off my feet. But I've realized since that it was a bad mistake. And now—now there's someone else—someone bigger and finer and nobler—Oh, I can't tell you how different! (Gazes raptly over heads of audience.) So that's the story. Is it very wicked?

Mei Ling: Wicked! Certainly not! You've told the other man, of course, about how you feel?

Mei Ling: I'd dare. The very first chance I got. Isn't it thrilling! There's something we can really do instead of just talking.

So Wan: What will you do with the things you seize?

Wing Fong: Have a bonfire? I'd agree to that.

Tuen I: That's what most of our discussion was about.

Wing Fong: The bonfire?

Wa Shang: **(Rises and joins the group at centre.)** Goose! About disposing of seized goods. It's a real problem. We haven't found an answer yet.

Mei Ling: It seems too bad to destroy things that people need.

Wing Fong: Then why not give them to the poor?

Tuen I: And make the poor sin against their country?

Wa Shang: Or have them arrested by the boycott society!

Wing Fong: **(Playfully.)** Why not sell the stuff? Lots of good causes need cash. **(Cries of disgust from the whole group.)**

Lai Yin: Who's a little patriot!

Tuen I: Making money out of Japanese goods!

Mei Ling: **(Oratorically.)** That would put us in the class with the soulless merchants who first bartered in the trash.

So Wan: Well, what will you do, then?

Wa Shang: The only logical way is to destroy what we seize. Wing Fong's bonfire isn't such a bad idea.

Mei Ling: But it's entirely too festive. I'd throw the stuff on the ground and trample it! Grind it into the dust!

Lai Yin: That would make rather a mess in the school garden.

Mei Ling: Oh, shut up, you wet-blanket! When we really have a chance to show our love for our country—

Wa Shang: You laugh at it, as you do at everything.

Yik Tok: **(Staring off right.)** Look at that fat old man stopping his rickshaw here. I bet he's rolling in money.

So Wan: **(Turning to see.)** He does look plutocratic. Maybe he'll help us with our fund for General Chan *(Chun)*.

Lai Yin: He's coming in. Here's your chance. Step up, young patriots.

Yik Tok: Should we?

(Rich Merchant enters right, limping slowly along.)

Tuen I: Of course. Come on. Who's afraid?

Wa Shang: **(Rising and pointing to a spot near left exit.)** Come on, girls! Going to help? Block the path over there! **(So Wan and Wing Fong cross behind CB. Mei Ling and Yik Tok go left of LB, and the four join hands to make a semicircle across the brick path. Wa Shang seizes Tuen I and Lai Yin by the hands, but Lai Yin breaks away with a disgusted look, and sits CB, pretending to study. Wa Shang and Tuen I run and join the semicircle.)**

Wa Shang: Give us some money for General Chan's campaign, good sir.

Tuen I: We won't let you go until you do.

Yik Tok: And we want a good round sum.

Merchant: What are you, young rascals? Students or bandits?

Mei Ling: Students, sir, who love their country and who want to save it from Japan.

Wa Shang: And General Chan is the one man who can save us.

Yik Tok: We're sending every cent we can raise to him.

Merchant: So loving your country makes you hound its respectable citizens!

Tuen I: Yes, if that's the only way we can make them pay.

Yik Tok: We're not patient! Don't keep us waiting!

Mei Ling: Pardon us, sir. We don't mean to be rude. But we've promised to raise a thousand dollars this week.

Merchant: And how much of the thousand do you think I can give you?

Wing Fong: **(Innocently.)** Why, all of it. **(The others look inquiringly at Mei Ling, who thinks a moment, studying the Merchant's clothes appraisingly.)**

Wa Shang: We'll let you pass if you give us a hundred dollars.

Merchant: Absurd! Do you think I carry a fortune in my pockets? See here! I'm a friend of the principal of this school. If you bother me any more I'll—

Tuen I: But surely, sir, it's worth a lot to you to keep Japan from invading China.

Yik Tok: Our principal will sympathize with our patriotism, not with your stinginess.

Wa Shang: We're not beggars, sir. Your own children would gladly do what we're doing.

Merchant: **(Groans and takes a purse slowly from the front of his gown.)** This is all the money I have with me. **(Hands a bill to Mei Ling.)** I hope you are satisfied!

Wa Shang: **(Inspects bill carefully to make sure it is good.)** All right, thank you, sir. **(They break their circle and line up, three on one side of the path and three on the other, to let him pass.)**

Merchant: **(Starting slowly off left.)** This is what comes of education. A good thing my children never went to school. You young ruffians should better be taught your places.

Mei Ling: "Taught our places!" Humph! I wish we'd held him up for four times the amount.

All: **(Crowding around Mei Ling and trying to see the bill.)** How much?

Wa Shang: Only fifty! The miser! **(They separate.)**

(Enter right, Kan Yee, with her arms full of bundles.)

Wa Shang: Hello, Kan Yee! What store have you been buying out?

Kan Yee: **(Laughing.)** All of them. I've been getting favors for our club party.

Wa Shang: Sure you haven't bought Japanese goods?

Kan Yee: Of course I haven't. I wouldn't do that!

Mei Ling: But are you sure? Let's see what you have. **(Takes a bundle from Kan Yee, opens it and inspects the contents carefully. Some she passes on to the others with a frown. Some drop to the ground. The contents are balloons, bead ornaments, balls, pencil-sharpeners, rubber toys.)** Why, Wong Kan Yee, this is all Japanese.

Yik Tok: How could you, Kan Yee?

Wing Fong: **(Gleefully.)** Trample it, Mei Ling. Grind it in the dust. Don't disappoint us.

Wa Shang: This sort of stuff usually comes from Japan. But let's make sure. Yes, **(looking closely at articles)** here it is, "Made in Japan." Here—it's been rubbed out. See? **(Showing the others.)** And here a "Made in China" label has been pasted over it.

Kan Yee: **(Beginning to cry.)** I didn't know—I didn't mean to— **(Mei Ling frowns.)**

So Wan: Don't be hard on her, Mei. She didn't realize—

Mei Ling: **(Coldly.)** Since when has ignorance of the law excused the law-breaker? We're fighting for our country, not defending ignorance. **(Throws on the ground the things she is holding and tramples them. Wa Shang follows her example, less enthusiastically. The others watch them, undecided. So Wan covertly pats Kan Yee's shoulder.)** Well, what about the rest of you? Weakened already? Cowards!

(Mei Ling sits beside Lai Yin, CB, takes up a book and turns the pages nervously. So Wan throws an arm about the weeping Kan Yee. She gestures to the others, and they pick up the scattered toys, wrap them hastily and thrust them into Kan Yee's arms. Exit left, Kan Yee, Wa Shang, So Wan, Yik Tok.)

Tuen I: Studying?

Wing Fong: Studying! With all this to gossip about? **(Mei Ling looks up, distressed.)**

Leave that for a duller day. Let's join the crowd. **(They gather their books and exit, left.)**

Lai Yin: Well, do you feel like a national hero?

Mei Ling: No, I feel like a beast.

Lai Yin: You did act rather like one.

Mei Ling: Lai Yin, you're a friend of mine, aren't you?

Lai Yin: That's one of the few good things ever said of me.

Mei Ling: And you've a clearer head than these others. What do you really think about all this?

Lai Yin: I hate it. It seems so cheap.

Mei Ling: Cheap! But it's for our country. Surely with a purpose like that—

Lai Yin: Ask your ethics teacher about the doctrine that the end justifies the means.

Mei Ling: Then you think I'm on the wrong track, don't you?

Lai Yin: Oh, I don't know. You at least go somewhere. But I—I just drift, and—laugh at the rest of you swimmers.

Mei Ling: Sometimes I wonder whether—I don't need—a religion.

Lai Yin: Heavens, Mei Ling! Don't take to opiates! You're much too real and too vital for that. **(Returns to her book.) (Mei Ling sighs heavily, goes to CB, sits and takes up her books. Enter right, Mr. Tong and Mr. Fung.)**

Voice from outside: Hong Kong paper, mister? (Tong turns back, exits, and returns immediately with a newspaper in his hand. Sits RDB and opens paper to one of the middle pages. Tong sits beside him and reads too. Suddenly one, then the other, starts, leans forward and reads with deep interest. Tong's face shows, in turn, annoyance, disgust, despair.)

Tong: Sold again!

Fung: Do you think it's true?

Tong: You know this paper's reputation. Hong Kong needn't fear Chinese politicians.

Fung: It's the limit!—but what you might have expected.

Tong: Oh, I did think that this time we had a leader worth following.

Fung: I didn't. I've seen them rise and fall too often.

Tong: And a cause that would unify China.

Fung: Will anything do that?

Tong: It looks as if I'm beaten.

Fung: *You*, beaten! How?

Tong: Oh, I've been an idealistic idiot. I had beautiful dreams of being a power and an influence—

Fung: That's still possible.

Tong: Not the way I dreamed it. I disappointed my family by refusing to go into politics. I looked all around and finally chose this teaching job, with the idea—Oh what a fool I was!—of instilling real patriotism into the women of the nation. But now—what's the use?

Fung: There's always room for you in my office.

Tong: I know—but I hate the thought.

Fung: (**Impatiently.**) Don't you see now, Tong, that you're on the wrong track? All this idealistic stuff is rot. Now I—I looked about me, too. I decided that in this world everybody grabs what he can, when he can, however he can. So, thought I, I may as well begin young to get mine.

Tong: (**Sarcastically.**) And you're getting it, I presume?

Fung: I'm getting more fun out of life than you are. Come and join me. Old Lum, your uncle, has pull with my chief. He can get you a post in a jiffy.

Tong: Doing what?

Fung: It doesn't matter what. You can always hire a secretary to do the work. I'll steer you to the fattest pickings.

(A bell jingles. Mei Ling gathers her books and looks wistfully at Mr. Tong's newspaper. Lai Yin keeps on working. Tong rises with a heavy sigh.)

Tong: Farewell, old chap. Have to go to class now. I'll think over what you say.

Mei Ling: (**Rises.**) Good morning, Mr. Tong. What's the news to-day?

Tong: (**Bitterly.**) Only that the head of the boycott society has deposited a million dollars to his personal account in Hong Kong—

Mei Ling: O—O—O—O—Oh!

Tong: (**More slowly.**) And General Chan—(**Lai Yin looks up quickly.**)

Mei Ling: What about General Chan?

Tong: Has accepted a post under the Japanese in Manchukuo!

(Mei Ling drops back on the bench and turns a horrified face to Lai Yin. Lai Yin, face inscrutable, stares straight ahead. As the curtain falls a second bell jingles.)

(Curtain)

SCENE III

The corner of a chemistry laboratory in a Chinese university, two years later. Two work-tables, placed as in the sketch, have each a large drawer below, and two shelves full of bottles above at the back. The bottles on Mei Ling's side contain only plain or colored water. On Wa Shang's side, three are important. These bottles, plainly labelled, contain respectively a few grains of table salt, ammonium hydroxide, and a weak solution of ferric chloride. The equipment of each table should include: an alcohol lamp or other small heater; water for washing utensils; a dust-cloth; two beakers; several test-tubes in a rack; a centimeter gauge; and a large loose-leaf notebook. Mei Ling's table should also have: a glass filter; filter-papers; and a glass rod. Wa Shang's table should have: a square of wire gauze to cover the flame of the heater; a textbook; and a fine wire for bead-tests, mounted on a small wooden handle. (*Note: The equipment may be simplified considerably.*)

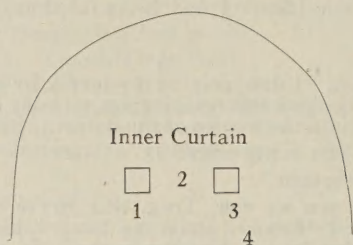
During this scene the two work as follows: Mei Ling consults no books and is not especially accurate, but thinks a great deal. Wa Shang looks at his book frequently and works with orderly precision.

Mei Ling's procedure: Pours some colored liquid from a bottle into a beaker. Adds water till the beaker is about half full. Lights her heater, borrows wire-gauze from Wa Shang, and warms the liquid. Fits a filter-paper into the glass filter. Pours the warm liquid through the filter. With the glass rod, pretends to remove some solid matter from the filter-paper. Puts the rod into a test-tube. Adds a few drops of another liquid to the test-tube's contents.

Wa Shang's procedure: Takes his laboratory apron from the drawer and puts it on. Carefully assembles all the materials and equipment he is going to use. Takes the bead-wire and carefully shapes it into a small loop. Lights his heater, warms the wire, dips it into the salt, and holds it in the flame for a minute. Looks at it carefully, but sees nothing. Repeats once or twice. Pours ferric chloride solution into a test-tube until the tube is half-full. Then measures a little ammonium hydroxide into the centimeter gauge; holds the test-tube up in view of the audience, and adds the hydroxide, drop by drop. Keeps on adding it after the precipitate has formed.* Sets down gauge, puts test-tube in rack and consults his book again. Enters results in his notebook.

*Both of these chemicals can be bought in an ordinary drug-store. If the ferric chloride solution is dark in color, dilute it with water until it is the color of amber. Adding the hydroxide to it should produce a thick reddish-brown precipitate.

Sketch of Stage



- 1—Wa Shang.
- 2—Mei Ling.
- 3—The Celebrity.
- 4—Dr. Aldrich.

(Mei Ling is discovered at work. Enter Wa Shang.)

Wa Shang: Hello! Here already? (**Puts on apron and begins work.**)

Mei Ling: Yes, I came right after Physics lecture.

Wa Shang: You do put in time. What are you working at?

Mei Ling: Still analysing this unknown. (**Shows bottle.**)

Wa Shang: Any progress? I finished two tables yesterday.

Mei Ling: Not much. I got the order of procedure wrong, and had to do a lot over.

Wa Shang: How could you? Didn't your book—

Mei Ling: I didn't use the book.

Wa Shang: You're even more of an idiot than I thought. (**Mei Ling picks up beaker and starts to put it over the fire.**) Don't put that beaker on a bare flame! Don't you know it will break?

Mei Ling: Of course I know it! Don't crab so! I was thinking—

Wa Shang: "Thinking!" It looked like it! Where's your wire gauze?

Mei Ling: (**Rummaging in the table drawer.**) Nowhere. That freshman who uses this desk is the most careless—

Wa Shang: Who did you say was careless? (**Taking wire gauze from drawer.**) Here. Take mine. I shan't need it.

Mei Ling: Thanks (**severely**). When I was interrupted, I was thinking about the use of textbooks. How can we become scientists if we depend upon books all the time?

Wa Shang: And how can we if we leave our books unopened all the time?

Mei Ling: But imagine a real analyst working like this. (**Parodies pouring liquid with one hand and frantically grasping a book in the other.**)

Wa Shang: And imagine a real analyst who got his order of procedure wrong.

Mei Ling: But, Wa Shang—Oh, it's no use. We just can't agree. It's queer, isn't it, when I like you so much.

Wa Shang: (**Grudgingly.**) You're not so bad either—even if you are a bit of a goose.

Mei Ling: I suppose we'll have to decide to get along without agreeing. (**They work in silence.**)

Wa Shang: Say! I forgot the news I had for you!

Mei Ling: News!

Wa Shang: Yes, news. The Celebrity we've been hearing so much about is visiting the University to-day!

Mei Ling: Really! When?

Wa Shang: Now. I saw his car drive up to the President's door.

Mei Ling: Do you suppose he'll come here?

Wa Shang: How should I know?

Mei Ling: Oh, I must see him. I think I'll die if I don't.

Wa Shang: And not come back to lab to-morrow? Oh, dear!

Mei Ling: (**Struggles to untie the strings of her apron which get tangled.**) Let's go out and find him.

Wa Shang: What's the idea? To lie in front of his car and make him stop? No, I'll tell you what! I'll support your fainting form by the roadside as he comes along. When he stops to see what's wrong, I'll say, Here is an aspiring young chemist dying in slow agony because she cannot see your face. Have pity, gracious sir! Deign to look at her.

Mei Ling: (**Laughs and gives up the struggle with her apron-strings.**) A beautiful "reductio ad absurdum." You win. To work! To work!

Wa Shang: Don't worry. He's sure to come here. He'd be more interested in the laboratories than in any other part of the University.

Mei Ling: (**Looking about.**) They aren't any different from other labs, are they?

Wa Shang: Haven't you read the catalogue? They're "unusually well-equipped."

Mei Ling: But he's certainly seen better—Wa Shang!

Wa Shang: Why the excitement?

Mei Ling: Maybe he'd be interested in seeing us!

Wa Shang: Silly! How could we interest him?

Mei Ling: (**With oratorical tone and attitude.**) Oh, young blood, you know. The hope of China, the future of science (**in normal tone**) and all that sort of rubbish.

Wa Shang: It isn't rubbish to you. You really believe it.

Mei Ling: Not at all. I've stopped believing things.

Wa Shang: (**With deep irony.**) Since lunch time? (**Pours ferric chloride into test-tube.**) Anyway, this young hope of China wants to find out what is in this solution.

Mei Ling: No success yet?

Wa Shang: (**Pours ammonium hydroxide into centimeter gauge.**) Not a morsel. I'm ready to test for iron now. The critical moment approaches. (**Pours hydroxide slowly into test-tube.**) Watch it, Mei Ling! Do I or don't I see—

Mei Ling: You do see! It's precipitating!

Wa Shang: (**Continues to add the hydroxide.**) It's getting darker. Would you call it reddish-brown? (**Thrusts tube into rack and sets down gauge. Runs down page of book with his finger. Reads.**) "—hydroxide is added, it forms a reddish-brown precipitate." (**Looks at tube again.**) It is reddish-brown, isn't it?

Mei Ling: (**Solemnly.**) It might pass for that.

Wa Shang: Then it is iron! Oh, joy, oh, bliss! I've really found something. Thought I'd be a week on this anyway. (**Takes his notebook and makes a careful entry. Mei Ling watches him curiously.**) I feel like a real chemist now.

Mei Ling: (**Puckering her brow.**) But this isn't the real thing, you know, Wa Shang. We're just following rules and solving puzzles that Professor Hau has set for us.

Wa Shang: (**Indignant.**) What on earth is the "real thing" then? It will be real enough for me if I can get a job as lab assistant when I graduate.

(**Enter Mr. Hau in haste.**)

Mr. Hau: Oh, you two are here! I'm taking a last look at everything. Dr. Aldrich is bringing him here in a minute. (**Looks about nervously.**)

Mei Ling: Here? To this lab? Are you sure?

Mr. Hau: He told me so himself only five minutes ago. (**Fusses with the bottles on Mei Ling's shelves.**) Get everything as neat as you can. (**Exits.**)

(**Wa Shang begins to make his table neat. Mei Ling takes a comb and compact out of the front of her dress and works on her complexion. She is facing Wa Shang, and suddenly catches his eye.**)

Wa Shang: Well, you are a woman, aren't you, though you play at being a scientist.

Mei Ling: (**Indignant.**) Play at it! You're disgusting, Wa Shang. Why can't I be a girl and a serious student as well? (**Puts away the comb and compact.**) Oh, look what a mess my table is! (**Seizes the dust-cloth and vigorously cleans the table top, knocking over a bottle.**) Oh—Oh—Oh! My unknown! What ever shall I do now?

Wa Shang: Don't worry—and don't hurry. If you just smile sweetly enough at Mr. Hau, he'll give you some new solution.

Mei Ling: (**Mournfully.**) And all because I was trying to make a good impression. Will I ever learn sense?

Wa Shang: Fortunately he's a research man. He's probably used to disorder.

(**Enter Dr. Aldrich and The Celebrity.**)

Dr. Aldrich: Good afternoon. These, doctor, are two promising students in my class in analytical chemistry. Miss Mei Ling and Mr. Wa Shang. (**Both bow deeply.**) I believe they are interested in making research their life-work.

The Celebrity: A very good day to you both. (**To Wa Shang.**) What are you doing now?

Wa Shang: I have just found iron. See the precipitate here. (**Showing test-tube.**)

Celebrity: Fine! And you? (**to Mei Ling.**)

Mei Ling: (**Humbly.**) I haven't found anything. I broke my bottle of solution. I was—I was trying so hard to make the place look neat when you came.

Celebrity: (**Laughs.**) I quite understand. I remember the time I went to apply for my first job. I spent two hours dressing, then fell into a mud puddle just at the door of the shop.

Mei Ling: (**With a grateful, eager smile.**) Oh, sir, have you time—are you very busy—I wanted so much to ask—

Dr. Aldrich: (**Looks at his watch with a frown.**) I'm very sorry, Miss Ling. Our program—

Celebrity: Our program can wait for a little. There is always time, Miss Ling, for those who really want to know.

Mei Ling: Oh, thank you, sir. (**Dr. Aldrich taps his foot impatiently. During the following conversation, he frequently looks at his watch and grows more impatient.**) Isn't science the thing that will help China most? I do so want my life to count for something.

Celebrity: (**Slowly.**) I'd like to say "yes." When I was younger I shouldn't have hesitated. But now, I'm not so sure.

Mei Ling: (**Disappointed.**) But surely, sir, science does wonderful things. Think what it has done for agriculture

Wa Shang: And for manufacturing

Mei Ling: And for public health

Celebrity: If you're making a list, why not add safe-cracking, explosives and poison gas. (**Wa Shang and Mei Ling look at each other sadly and sigh.**)

Mei Ling: But don't you think science does any good at all?

Celebrity: Science has no moral quality. It is neither good nor bad. It is a tool that men use for their own purposes.

Wa Shang: Then a good tool, certainly, for it has made people happier.

Celebrity: If so, I haven't met those people. It has made some more comfortable, others more leisured, and others it has made miserable.

Mei Ling: Then why did you give your life to it, sir?

Celebrity: Perhaps I couldn't help myself. I was born with an inquiring mind. Till I die I shall probably keep on asking questions of the universe.

Wa Shang: Then if we have inquiring minds, too, wouldn't you advise us—

Celebrity: I never advise anybody. If you have in your heart that unquenchable longing for truth—

Mei Ling: Truth! That's it. Isn't it a glorious thing to find truth?

Celebrity: Probably so—if one ever found it.

Wa Shang: But you, sir. Surely you have found!

Celebrity: I seriously doubt whether in my whole life I have found one particle of truth.

Wa Shang: (**Aghast.**) But your wonderful discoveries!

Celebrity: Some of them were merely discoveries of what was not true. The others future generations will smile at as childish guesses. I hope I may have cleared the way a little for my successors by removing some error from their path.

Mei Ling: If one could find what was not true—and teach men to avoid that—It's so easy to teach what everyone wants to learn.

Celebrity: How many care to learn? Most of us are very comfortable in our snug little houses of prejudice and error. We don't want to be disturbed.

Wa Shang: All people aren't like that.

Celebrity: Are they not? Forgive me for speaking very frankly. Are not you yourselves illustrating the truth of what I say?

Wa Shang and Mei Ling: We?

Celebrity: You ask me a question. But you want only the affirmative answer that confirms your own belief. I give you a non-committal reply, and shall go away knowing that you did not believe me.

(Mei Ling looks at him in earnest bewilderment, then, as his meaning breaks on her, drops her head ashamed. Wa Shang looks incredulous. Celebrity moves toward exit, followed by Dr. Aldrich. Mei Ling runs after him.)

Mei Ling: May I ask one more question, sir? (Celebrity stops and nods.) What is there for us to do?

Celebrity: (Kindly.) You must find your own way. I can only suggest what probably lies ahead. But perhaps—perhaps you will go far ahead of me and . . . (hesitates.)

Both: (Eagerly.) Yes?

Celebrity: Teach men to want the truth.

(Curtain)

SCENE IV

(Setting same as that of Scene II. So Wan and Wing Fong are sitting on centre bench with Yik Tok and Tuen I stretched on the ground, a little to the right.)

So Wan: Just two more weeks till graduation. It hardly seems possible, does it? We've been here four years, which at times seemed like eternity and then suddenly it's all over.

Wing Fong: And we're thrown out upon the cruel, cold world to struggle for our bread and butter.

Yik Tok: I can see the struggle you are going to make, Wing Fong, but it's a worthy thought.

Wing Fong: That's all you know about it. So Wan and I are going to teach. We planned it all last year.

Tuen I: (In mock distress.) O—o—o—h!

So Wan: What's the matter?

Tuen I: Not much. I merely groan in anticipation of the results.

So Wan: Nasty boy! Isn't it funny that I don't mind being teased so much as I used to? Had you made a remark like that to me, even as late as last year, I should have been moved to throw things.

Tuen I: Sorry I hadn't noticed the metamorphosis.

(So Wan feints a throw at him with her book, Tuen I ducks and laughingly throws up an arm to protect himself.)

Tuen I: I still don't!

Yik Tok: (Seriously.) I think So Wan's right. We are all a little bit changed. We have had our lessons, our games, our good times together and have learned to accept one another for what we are. Perhaps that is only part of the reason. The rest of it is that we are growing up.

So Wan: And some of us have to separate, too. Maybe that's why it hurts—because we are a little older and see our responsibilities.

Tuen I: Which of you gives the Valedictory? The competition is frightful from here. Try as I may I can't get rid of Yik Tok. He positively insists on going to the University with me.

Wing Fong: So that's the cause of this mood. I am so glad, Tuen I. You wanted to go dreadfully, didn't you?

Tuen I: More than anything in my life before, I guess.

So Wan: How did it happen?

Tuen I: Well, I wished and wished and wished until I broke down my Uncle's resistance, and rather than have me a living shadow of my former self, he put up the money for my course.

So Wan: I'll bet you're happy. Things seem to be turning out right for everyone, except . . .

Wing Fong: Lai Yin, do you mean? What is she going to do?

So Wan: I don't know. If all the world knew my brother for a criminal and a suicide . . . (shudders.)

Yik Tok: How does Lai Yin feel about it?

So Wan: Well, that's the amazing part of it. She is upset, of course, but not as much as any of us would be in the same circumstances. I don't know what makes the difference.

Wing Fong: I do. Lai Yin goes to church.

Tuen I: Do you think that could do it? Why, I've been to church, too, but I don't think that would make it any easier for me to accept a blow like that.

Yik Tok: Maybe Lai Yin goes in a different spirit.

So Wan: I believe that's it, Yik Tok. Do you remember what Lai Yin used to be like? She scoffed at all the things we did as being childish and futile, but for a long time she didn't bother to substitute much else for it besides her music and dreaming. Then, last year, she began to take an interest in the church, and went regularly.

Wing Fong: And since then she has been much more settled. She has even taken part again in the games she laughed at, but I never thought of that as having anything specially to do with her church or her religion.

Tuen I: **(Looks back and listens.)** There's somebody coming.

(Lai Yin enters with some sheet music under her arm.)

Lai Yin: Why, what have we here? Hello, everybody. Planning your futures, I suppose.

Wing Fong: You're a mind reader. How did you know?

Lai Yin: I saw it in your eyes as I came along. It's the time of year for such things, and besides I have just decided mine.

So Wan: Oh, Lai Yin, what?

Lai Yin: I am going home in a few days.

So Wan: **(In amazement.)** Leave Canton for your village? Why, Lai Yin.

Lai Yin: Why not? I've had four wonderful years here. It's time I started passing on a little to someone less lucky.

Yik Tok: But, Lai Yin, you could get a good job in Canton. There would be music here and companionship—all the things you like. You'll die of loneliness in your village.

(Mei Ling and Wa Shang enter during this last speech, carrying Chemistry notebooks. They quietly join the group.)

Wing Fong: Why, what will you do, Lai Yin?

Lai Yin: **(Brightly.)** Find some little girls and boys with music in their souls and start a class. There's plenty to be done, you know.

Mei Ling: But your own music, Lai Yin. You'll never keep it up. You'll get careless and lazy because no one will know whether you are playing well or not.

Lai Yin: Oh, I hope it won't be as bad as that. I have my Victrola, and I'm going to spend every cent I can lay my hands on for records. I'll get a radio, too, and before many years my pupils will be my critics.

Wing Fong: Oh, but it sounds so drab and dull. How can you face it?

Lai Yin: Drab and dull! I'm sorry I've put it so badly. I have already said that I have had four wonderful years here and I wanted to pass it on to others. But since I've said that much, I might as well say more about what I really feel, as we are all such old friends.

Mei Ling: Yes, do tell us more.

Lai Yin: In this last year I have discovered, through my church, something more about the "abundant life" which Jesus offers to His followers. I know my village needs this, just as much as I do, and I believe I can help some people to find it. Then those of us who do, can work together for the Kingdom of God in our village. And now I'd better go and practise, for I don't believe the Kingdom can afford to have poor workmen.

Tuen I: **(Admiringly.)** So that is why Lai Yin is different. What spirit!

So Wan: And what a religion! **(All go out except Mei Ling and Wa Shang.)**

Mei Ling: Did you hear what So Wan said, Wa Shang? **(Wa Shang nods.)** Do you suppose she's right?

Wa Shang: I do not know, Mei Ling. It might be anything—false courage, reaction, perhaps, after her brother's death—

Mei Ling: **(Speaking very rapidly.)** Oh, you know it's not. Lai Yin has something we want, Wa Shang. Do you remember what the Celebrity said to us, "Teach men to want the truth." I didn't understand then what he meant, but I do now. Lai Yin has taught me to want the truth. Don't you see? It's the same as her "abundant life" and the "Kingdom of God." And she means to do it through teaching music in her own village! Why, Wa Shang, it can be done. I've looked for so long—in athletics, in patriotic societies, and in research, and now I find that they are mediums for what I have been seeking. Oh, Wa Shang, why can't we do it too, you through your medicine, I in Social Service? **(Stops, breathless.)**

Wa Shang: **(Going a step nearer to Mei Ling and taking her hand.)** We can, Mei Ling . . . and we will.

(Curtain)

